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AUTHOR(S):

LIVINGSTON, Paisley

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Arguing over Intentions*

Paisley LIVINGSTON

Are the artist's intentions relevant to claims about the meaning of a work of art? Absolute intentionalists hold that a work's meaning is equivalent to what the artist intended, while absolute anti-intentionalists contend that intentions are never relevant. Between these extremes lie a number of more subtle positions, such as the idea that some, but not all intentions are relevant to certain kinds of interpretive claims. The accounts are multiplied by the different assumptions that can be made about the nature and status of intentions and other authorial attitudes and activities. Some intentionalists have in view only the actual author's intentions, and thus work with one of several possible understandings of intentionalist psychology. Others defend intentionalism along more or less anti-realist lines, speaking of different sorts of authorial *personae* that may be constructed, postulated, hypothesized, or feigned by interpreters. And so the debate surrounding intentionalism in its multiple guises continues.¹

To paraphrase Frank Ramsey (and perhaps Kant and Hegel as well), when opinion on a topic has been polarized for a long time, sometimes it is best not to choose sides. Instead, we should attempt to find out what is wrong with the question people have been trying to answer. Yet the question concerning artists' intentions is a genuine one. It is, moreover, a question that has important implications for the world of the arts, including various aspects of related educational practices. It also seems that various sides in the debate over intentionalism find some support in arguments and examples that are not readily discounted, so that a genuine solution must incorporate these insights. Such is my goal in what follows. First I evoke what I take to

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¹ See, for example, Gary Iseminger, ed., *Intention and Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); and George Dickie and W. Kent Wilson, 'The Intentional Fallacy: Defending Beardsley', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 53 (1995), 233–50.

be the sensible claims and insights on both sides of the debate. I then focus on views that promise to reconcile these contrasting claims, considering in particular Jerrold Levinson's hypothetical intentionalism and a rival position that I call moderate intentionalism.

The intentionalist's most basic insight is that if we are to arrive at an adequate appreciation of a work of art, we must first anchor the text or artefact in the context of its creation.² This claim is supported by arguing that not all of the artistically or aesthetically relevant features of a work of art are intrinsic properties of the text; some are relational and can only be known when the text is cognized correctly in the context of its creation. In making this point, a number of philosophers have evoked versions of Jorge-Luis Borges's fictional example of Pierre Menard: tokens of the same text, created in different contexts, manifest different, artistically relevant relational features; to know which features are those of the work, one must interpret the text in its context of creation.³

To illustrate this general point with a different kind of example, we may consider briefly the *vanitas* painted by David Bailly (1584–1657) around 1651.⁴ The image depicts a young man, seated next to a table, facing the viewer. On the table are various objects typical of the *vanitas* genre: a skull, flower blossoms, an hour glass, a candle that has just been snuffed, symbols of wealth, power, beauty, the arts, and life's transient pleasures. In the air hover soap bubbles to remind us that *homo bulla est*. And the young artist holds on display an oval portrait—perhaps his own work—in which he is depicted as a much older man. Hanging from the table is a scrap of paper

² I shall assume in what follows that all existing works of art are in part comprised of at least one physically instantiated (token) text, artefact, or structure; such a condition would be satisfied if the text of a poem had never been written down but was held in at least one person's memory. For stylistic reasons, I shall refer in what follows uniquely to texts, assuming, perhaps somewhat rashly, that my remarks hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for other media.

³ See Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); David Davies, 'Text, Context, and Character: Goodman on the Literary Artwork', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 21 (1991), 331–45; Gregory Currie, 'Work and Text', *Mind*, 100 (1991), 325–40; and Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," in *Music, Art, and Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 63–88.

⁴ Oil on wood, 89.5 × 122 cm.; Stadelijk Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden. For a colour reproduction and commentary, see Norbert Schneider, *The Art of the Still Life: Still Life Painting in the Early Modern Period* (Cologne: Taschen, 1990), pp. 82–84.

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displaying the artist's signature and the date 1651. It is often assumed that this painting is a self-portrait (and a self-portrait containing an embedded self-portrait), and if this interpretive claim is correct, it is a matter of identifying a relational property involving facts about the image's creation—for example, facts about who is depicted and by whom. What is more, the time of this act of self-depiction, relative to the life history of the artist, is directly relevant to some of the choices the interpreter of this picture must make. Suppose the viewer assumes that the painting was made when the artist was still young. In that case, the self-portrait shows us an artist who has depicted himself holding up an image in which he has anticipated the passage of time by representing the future effects of his own aging. Both the actual artist and his youthful self in the depiction are, then, situated in a living present, which is the vantage point from which they anticipate a future process of aging and demise, foreshadowed in the portrait, skull, and other objects. Yet consider how our reading of the image must change if we learn that when he painted this picture the artist was in fact much older than the young man in the image. In that case, we can infer that this depiction was not intended to show us the artist's appearance at the time of the work's creation. Instead, the 'present' moment in the picture's contents, the moment when the young artist displays a picture of himself as an older man, is, relative to the time of the work's creation, a moment already long past. Painting this image in 1651 when he was 67 years old, Bailly would have depicted the time of his youth, as well the time of his maturity, as bygone moments, the former anticipating the latter in an image, just as the artist himself, in painting and displaying this self-portrait, anticipates the moment when future viewers will contemplate this *vanitas stilleben* as the vain trace of a life that is over.⁵ The more general, intentionalist claim supported by this example is that facts about an artefact's or text's relation to the context of its making make a crucial difference to crucial interpretive claims about some works of art. This looks like an intuition that all anti-intentionalists should acknowledge. Some extreme anti-intentionalists, however, espouse a ludic or transgressive 'anything goes' hermeneutic policy and therefore deny that it is necessary or desirable to situate a text in its context of production. They may allow that some form

⁵ Schneider (p. 82) assumes that the painting is a self-portrait by Bailly, and states without argument that the oval portrait depicts the artist's 'current features'. Yet the figure represented there does not look 67 years old, and as Ron Toby suggested in conversation, it is unlikely that painterly conventions of the time support the conclusion that the figure in the portrait is supposed to be that old.

of contextualization is necessary to every interpretation, but they challenge any 'privileging' of the context of creation. Yet there are glaring problems with such an approach when it is presented as a general interpretive theory. Ludic and transgressive interpretations sometimes have their rewards, but it is important to note that they are parasitic on the kinds of interpretations from which they diverge. For example, to engage in or to appreciate a transgressive 'Phallus in Wonderland' reading of Lewis Carroll's book one must first be in a position to have some sense of the gap between such a reading and the novel's actual historical and generic situation. It is fine to debunk the straightjacket of absolute intentionalism, but the interest of subversive readings does not entail the irrelevance of facts about authorship. An insistence on the importance of the context of creation does not, in any case, entail that one denies that works of art have consequences and a significance that were not intended by the artist.

Most anti-intentionalists in fact grant a general thesis to the effect that situating a text in its context of production is necessary to a broad range of appropriate interpretive claims. For example, it is generally agreed that in order to interpret a text adequately, one must know what language it was written in (which is a fact about the genesis of the text), and in what (art) historical context this writing occurred. What anti-intentionalists dispute, then, is the more specific idea that *intentions* are a necessary (or even a relevant) aspect of the context of production in which a text may justifiably be situated. Intentions, they claim, are relevant to what an artist was trying to do, but are not always indicative of what the artist has actually done in making a work. After all, we sometimes act on an intention but fail to realize the intended state of affairs. For example, if I intend to utter a phrase in English meaning 'I was nurtured on positivism', act on that intention and say 'I was weaned on positivism', my intention has not been realized.⁶ Here, and in what follows, we assume that intentions are psychological states having both a representational and an attitudinal dimension. The attitude is an executive one, roughly equivalent to being settled on undertaking a course of action. The representational content of an intention is a plan of action.⁷ Such a conception of intentions is neutral with regard to many outstanding issues

⁶ The example is borrowed from Noël Carroll's 'Art, Intention, and Conversation', in Iseminger, ed. *Intention and Interpretation*, p. 100.

⁷ For more detail on this conception of intentions, see Paisley Livingston and Alfred R. Mele, 'Intention and Literature', *Stanford French Review*, 16 (1992), 173–96, and Alfred R. Mele, *Springs of Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

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in (philosophical) psychology, including the question whether intentions are reducible to complexes of such other attitudes as belief and desire. One of the strongest insights on the anti-intentionalist side, then, is that intentions are not always successfully realized, in which case the text's features may not correspond to the maker's intentions. With this assumption in mind, the anti-intentionalist formulates a dilemma for the intentionalist: either the artist's intentions are successfully realized in the text, in which case reference to them is unnecessary; or the intentions were not successfully realized in the text, in which case reference to them is insufficient, because what the work really means is not what the artist intended it to mean. Any viable form of intentionalism must find a way out of this dilemma.⁸ Intentionalists should recognize that artists do not always act on or successfully realize their intentions, and that some intentions do not determine the work's meanings. It follows that the intentionalist must attack the other horn of the dilemma, arguing that some intentions are nonetheless relevant to interpretations and are not simply redundant with regard to the text's meanings. An example is the intention that a certain meaning be unstated in the text yet implicitly expressed in the work. Such an intention would be relevant in the following kind of situation: interpreted standardly in the language in which it was written (and in light of aspects of the context of production), the text does not explicitly express the proposition *p*; nor does it express its contrary, *q*; the textual evidence supports the thesis that *either p or q* (and not the disjunctive proposition, *p or q*) must be right, and it is the artist's intentions that determine which proposition is true of the work. Are there such cases? It is easy to provide potential examples, but not so easy to say what the implications are for the debate over intentionalism.

Consider the following critical claims. In the afterward to her translation of a novel by Natsume Sōseki, Norma Moore Field identifies the work as the

⁸ The dilemma receives various formulations in the literature. Recently, Jerrold Levinson points to the danger of circularity in the actual intentionalist's analysis of work meaning. The latter, he persuasively contends, should not be analyzed in terms of successfully realized intentions, where this sort of success is in turn explicated in terms of the work's meanings. Levinson concludes that the analysis of work meaning must therefore 'involve a perceiver effect or audience uptake condition'. See his 'Intention and Interpretation in Literature', chapter 10 of his *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 175–213; citation, p. 180, n. 12. An earlier version of this essay appeared as 'Intention and Interpretation: A Last Look', in *Intention and Interpretation*, ed. Gary Iseminger, 221–56. Henceforth I cite the more recent version.

second novel in a trilogy. Explicitly raising the issue of her grounds for speaking of a trilogy, she comments:

After *Sanshirō* had appeared in the newspaper, Sōseki explained in an advance notice that he was entitling the next work “And Then,” first because *Sanshirō* was about a university student, and the next work would be about what “then” happened; second, because *Sanshirō* was a simple man, but the new main character would be in a more advanced stage; and finally, a strange fate was to befall this character, but what “then” followed would not be described. *The Gate*, the last novel in the trilogy, is about what “then” might have followed. Obviously, these are only the most schematic links between the novels. The progression of age and situation of the central characters provides a framework for the complex interaction of Sōseki’s lifelong themes. The three novels anticipate and harken back to each other in such a way that a consideration of them as a group becomes valuable.⁹

The commentator then goes on to detail some of these interrelations between the three novels. Some of her claims are supported by reference to the text’s meanings, but she also bases her argument on an independent claim about the artist’s intentions. She does not contend, for example, that the texts explicitly convey the idea that the main characters in each successive novel are literally continuations of the characters in the previous work(s). The student Sanshirō does not literally resurface in *And Then* having assumed the name Daisuke; nor is Daisuke his reincarnation (which is how Yukio Mishima links some of the characters in the novels belonging to his *Sea of Fertility* tetralogy). Instead, the relations between the stories conveyed in the trilogy are a matter of counterfactual (perhaps one should say ‘counterfactual-factual’) ideas about possible relations between analogous fictional situations and agents in the three stories. For example, the story of Daisuke describes what ‘might’ have happened to someone like Sanshirō in similar socio-historical circumstances. But these relations are not stated explicitly anywhere in the novels. Instead, they are only implicitly communicated by the novelist, who invites his readers to think of his fictional *personae*, and relations between them, as expressing ideas about social types and possibilities. Such ideas about the counterfactual and analogical relations between fictional agents and events in the three stories of the trilogy are not part of the novels’ explicit, literal content, but to miss them would arguably be to fail to appreciate important links between the three novels in the trilogy. Nor does it seem adequate to say that the novels are ambiguous

⁹ Norma Moore Field, ‘Afterword,’ *And Then: Natsume Sōseki’s Novel Sorekara* (Rowland, Vermont and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1988), pp. 258–78; citation, p. 266.

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between the novelist's intended sociological reading and its contrary, for on such an interpretation, Sōseki failed miserably to produce the kind of works he was aiming at.

It looks like intentionalists can identify cases where intentions play a decisive role in determining a work's implicit content. But anti-intentionalists may want to deny this. To that end, the anti-intentionalist evokes examples that seem to resemble such cases very closely, but which appear to warrant a rather different conclusion.¹⁰ For example, the anti-intentionalist tells a story in which a Japanese novelist—let's call him Sōseki the Strange—holds a press conference in which he sincerely and accurately reveals his intention that the three main characters in his trilogy were meant to be the successive appearances of a Martian in disguise. Such a reading is coherent with the textual evidence in the sense that nothing in the texts, standardly and literally interpreted, explicitly contradicts such a claim. Yet the Martian-story line seems tacked on and extraneous, and many readers would have failed to think of it had they not read the interview. Do we not want to deny the intentionalist's idea that the fact that the author wrote with this implicit content in mind suffices to make such a loopy interpretation the correct reading of the story?

In what follows, I shall assess some different strategies for dealing with this issue. A first approach, motivated in part by the intuition that Sōseki the Strange's intention does not make the Martian story-line part of the work's content, proposes a principled way of ruling all such authorial intentions irrelevant. A second approach accepts Sōseki the Strange's intention along with those of his counterpart Natsume Sōseki. And a third tries to find a way to develop a principled distinction between the two kinds of intentions, ruling the latter in, and the former out. After describing these three strategies in some detail, I shall return to the question of how we might choose between them.

The first strategy is a matter of putting a constraint on the kinds of evidence relevant to intentions deemed admissible in interpretive argumentation. Such a view is defended by Jerrold Levinson, who follows William Tolhurst

¹⁰ This kind of objection takes various forms in the literature. David Lewis evokes a Conan Doyle who secretly believes in purple gnomes; see his 'Truth in Fiction', *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Vol. I, 261–80. Levinson imagines a Franz Kafka whose private diary reveals limited and uninteresting semantic intentions with regard to 'A Country Doctor'; see his 'Intentions and Interpretations', 184–86.

in speaking of 'hypothetical intentionalism'.¹¹ According to the latter, the meaning of an utterance is not (necessarily) the actual author's intention (or the utterer's meaning); instead, it is the intention that a member of the *intended* audience would be justified in attributing to the author, and this uniquely on the basis of evidence possessed by virtue of being a member of the intended audience. Levinson amends this view by eliminating reference to the actual author's intentions concerning the target audience; instead, it is the *appropriate* or *ideal* audience of a work (intended or not) that matters.

How, more specifically, this interpretive principle is to be applied is a subtle matter. The idea that evidence is only admissible if an interpreter has it *by virtue of membership* in an appropriate audience is meant to eliminate privileged or private information; admissible evidence must be accessible, at least in principle, to all members of the audience in question. Yet this interpretive principle is not reducible to the simple fact that all (or even most) of the members of a given audience happen to have a specific body of evidence. Suppose, for example, that the appropriate audience of a work is comprised of francophones having a good background knowledge of the history of French literature and the socio-cultural history of France. Suppose as well that readers belonging to this group must interpret a passage in Marcel Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu* where the Baron de Charlus makes a veiled reference to a character in one of Molière's lesser-known dramas. Not all such readers will remember the play and recognize the allusion, but as members of the audience in question, they would ideally be able to do so and would in principle be required to accept this publicly accessible, intertextual evidence as germane to an interpretive claim about Proust's work. It follows, then, that what makes an audience an (or the) appropriate (or ideal) audience is ultimately the kind of evidence its members potentially and ideally possess and use in interpreting works. So it is not at bottom the selection of an audience *qua* social fact that determines what kind of evidence will be judged admissible; instead, the determination of an audience is informed by criteria of admissibility of evidence that are to be preferred for various reasons having to do with a larger conception of art and its appreciation.

In Levinson's development of this approach, the appropriate audience is, most pointedly, not an audience the members of which possess evidence concerning the private attitudes of the author; nor is it an audience more

¹¹ William E. Tolhurst, 'On What a Text Is and How It Means', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 19 (1979), 3-14.

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interested in the author's thoughts and emotions than in the works that may express them. The appropriate audience is, however, one the members of which seek to anchor the work in its context of creation, reading the text in the 'generative matrix' where it 'issues forth from individual A, with public persona B, at time C, against cultural background D, in light of predecessors E, in the shadow of contemporary events F, in relation to the remainder of A's artistic oeuvre, G, and so on'.¹² Yet as Levinson himself helpfully points out, it remains unclear where one should draw the line between admissible and inadmissible evidence concerning the author's attitudes and persona. This is, he comments, the crux of the issue: 'what is the scope of specific author-based contextual factors in the genesis of a literary work that are legitimately appealed to in constructing our best hypothesis of intended meaning?'¹³ At one extreme is the narrow scope of a text interpreted solely in terms of the language and century of composition; at the other extreme is the broad scope that includes diaries, interviews, and other publicly accessible sources of information about the author's attitudes. Levinson indicates that the interpretive constraint he recommends is broader than the former extreme, but narrower than the latter; expressed intentions in interviews, for example, are ruled out, as is 'any fact about the author's actual mental state or attitude during composition, in particular what I have called his semantic intentions for a text'.¹⁴

To understand Levinson's views on the interpretation of works of art, it is important to keep in mind that he distinguishes between categorial and semantic intentions, espousing actual intentionalism with regard to the former and hypothetical intentionalism with regard to the latter. Semantic intentions are an artist's intentions to mean something in or by a text or artefact, while categorial intentions 'involve the maker's conception of what he has produced and what it is for, on a rather basic level; they govern not what a work is to mean but how it is to be fundamentally conceived or approached'.¹⁵ An example of such a categorial intention would be Sōseki's intention that his text entitled *Mon* be read as a work of literary fiction. Levinson would allow, then, that interpreters who fail to recognize this authorial intention are unlikely to do a good job of appreciating the work; yet the evidentiary

¹² Levinson, 'Intention and Interpretation', p. 184.

¹³ Levinson, 'Intention and Interpretation', p. 178, n. 11.

¹⁴ Levinson, 'Intention and Interpretation', p. 206.

¹⁵ Levinson, 'Intention and Interpretation', p. 188.

filter of hypothetical intentionalism is to be applied to the novelist's various semantic intentions.

It is also important to note that Levinson's theory of interpretation is distinct from the kind of fictionalist account promoted by Alexander Nehamas.¹⁶ According to the latter, the interpreter's goal is not a matter of seeking to know the *actual* author's intentions, be they semantic or categorial. Instead, the target of interpretation is the meaning intended by a constructed, artistically relevant authorial persona. In Levinson's account of interpretation, the *actual* author's categorial intentions (such as the intention to make a work belonging to a particular genre), are a legitimate (and at times even crucial) target of interpretive enquiry. And with regard to semantic intentions, it is again the *actual* author's intentions that are the target of the interpretation, provided, however, that the evidentiary strictures described above are observed. At times, evidence about the actual artist's intentions, although accessible and reliable, is deemed irrelevant: for example, the members of the hypothetical intentionalist's ideal readership will pay no attention to Natsume Sōseki's interview statements when they ponder his works' meanings. This may be why Levinson at times refers to his position as non-intentionalist (as opposed to intentionalist or anti-intentionalist), while also claiming that his views are 'akin to' or 'resonate' with the views of Nehamas. Yet Levinson adds that in hypothetical intentionalism, there is 'no prescription to imagine or make-believe anything about the author (the actual or the hypothesized one), and the hypothetical author, i.e. the author-as-hypothesized does not belong to the (or any) fictional world, as does, say the narrator'.¹⁷

How does Levinson's account handle the Martian case presented above? To answer this question, we must first determine whether the intention in question is of the semantic or categorial variety. In this regard, one might conjecture that the novelist's intention has to do with the kind of works he was trying to create, namely, works belonging to a trilogy in which some of the characters bear certain relations to each other. In that case, the reader's uptake of the author's intentions could be deemed necessary to an appropriate interpretation of the works. Yet it could also be plausibly contended that

¹⁶ Alexander Nehamas, 'What an Author Is', *Journal of Philosophy*, 83 (1986), 685–91; 'The Postulated Author: Critical Monism as Regulative Ideal', *Critical Inquiry*, 8 (1981), 13149. For excellent (and in my view decisive) criticisms, see Robert Stecker, 'Apparent, Implied, and Postulated Authors', *Philosophy and Literature*, 11 (1987), 258–71.

¹⁷ Personal communication.

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Sōseki the Strange's statement is about the meanings of his characterizations, which are part of the novels' stories, in which case the intention should be deemed a semantic one. By eliminating from critical consideration 'private' semantic intentions as well as publicly documented ones, Levinson's approach would then rule that the members of the ideal audience need not countenance the idea that the stories in the three novels are implicitly connected by a disguised extraterrestrial presence. Nothing in the novels themselves, in the author's public persona, or in any other relevant evidence supports the Martian reading, so even a sincere and accurate authorial report on the intentions that oriented the writing of the trilogy would be discounted. A third option is to judge that the intentions in question straddle the distinction between categorial and semantic intentions, making it difficult to handle this example with a mixed account of interpretation that combines actual and hypothetical intentionalism. Given that the latter distinction is far from razor sharp, and that the two kinds of intentions frequently have important implications for each other, the example can be seen as weighing against mixed theories of interpretation and in favour of unified accounts.

I turn now to intentionalist strategies designed as alternatives to both fictionalist and hypothetical intentionalism. While the latter view places a constraint on the kinds of evidence members of an appropriate or ideal audience can rely on in building an image of the author (and by the same stroke, a conception of the utterance's meaning), what I shall call *moderate intentionalism* is a thesis about the kinds of actual authorial intentions that are and are not *constitutive* of a work's meanings. Very generally, moderate intentionalism is the view that often the *actual* maker(s)' attitudes and doings are responsible for some of a work's content, and as such are a legitimate target of interpretive claims; more specifically, some (but not all) artist's semantic and other intentions are relevant, even necessary, to some (but not all) valuable interpretive insights because such intentions are sometimes constitutive of the work's content.

Moderate intentionalism recognizes that the artist's intentions do not constitute the work's meaning when contradicted by the explicit content of a text (interpreted standardly and literally, in the language in which it was written). If I say 'Let me sew you to your sheet' having intended to say 'Let me show you to your seat', my utterance does not mean the latter; good interpreters are attuned to the difference between a comic and inadvertent way of conveying one's intentions and the literal and direct manner of doing the same. Yet when intentions are compatible with the text's explicit contents,

they can be constitutive of a work's implicit meanings.

Moderate intentionalism's claims about the implicit meanings of a work can be articulated within a *broadly* Gricean framework where the notion of conversational implicature has been adapted so as to develop a conception of what could be dubbed 'artistic' implicature.¹⁸ A key claim, then, is that appropriate inferences made within the artist/interpreter relation are guided by assumptions analogous—but not identical—to the maxims proposed by Grice with reference to everyday conversation. Artistic implicatures, then, are inferences to implicit content based on the explicit content of a text or artefact, as well as on assumptions shared by artists and their audiences, including contextual beliefs and beliefs about the nature of the artist/interpreter interaction. For example, authors and interpreters are guided by the hypothesis of a 'thin' authorial rationality: if an author intends to express *p* implicitly, the author will try to adopt expressive means that are likely to make *p* manifest to interpreters who are reasonably competent at assessing textual and contextual evidence. To that end, the author intends to write a text that does not contain *p* as part of its explicit content, a text, however, which will make it possible (if not highly likely) for the members of the audience to infer the implicit content by relying on both the text and contextual assumptions. What is more, when authors try to communicate something implicitly, they intend for their success in realizing this aim to depend on the audience's recognition of that intention. Gathering these ideas together, we can propose the following analysis of a work's implicit content:

Given an author, A, text, T, and work, W, a meaning, *p*, is part of W's implicit content if and only if:

- (1) A intentionally writes T;
- (2) standardly and literally interpreted in terms of the language in which it was written, T entails explicit contents logically compatible with, but not including *p*;

¹⁸ I say 'broadly' because I intend to remain neutral on many of the controversies in contemporary pragmatics. For background, see Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 97–166; François Recanati, *Meaning and Force: The Pragmatics of Performative Utterances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 118–121; and Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1995).

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(3) A intends:

- (i) that some of the work's readers interpret *W* as meaning *p*;
- (ii) that some of the work's readers recognize A's intention (3i), and recognize that conditions (1) and (2) hold;
- (iii) that the fulfillment of (i) depend on the fulfillment of (ii)¹⁹

As long as the intention to imply *p* takes the form described and occurs in the context specified by conditions (1) and (2), we can assume that the artist is settled on making this implicit meaning part of the work when creating the text, which suffices for it be so. In other words, intentions of the right sort are constitutive of a certain kind of work meaning. Whether any actual readers' inferences actually correspond to those intentions is a logically separate matter. Thus the analysis does not include the 'perceiver effect or audience uptake condition' evoked by Levinson, but nor does it include the disputed concept of 'successfully realized intention'.

Following this analysis, both Natsume Sōseki and Sōseki the Strange, in the examples presented earlier, satisfy the requisite conditions and imply specific contents in their works. Clearly, we do not tend to think that the fact that Sōseki the Strange's work includes the implicit Martian story-line makes it a better work. Although the Martian story-line is compatible with the text, it seems extraneous with regard to the rest of the story and does not contribute to the work's overall thematic unity. Readers with strange reading habits and preoccupations with extra-terrestrials may hit on the author's intentions, others will not, so the novels' implicit contents will often go unnoticed. Yet the Martian story-line has been intentionally implied by the author, and the interpreter who fails to acknowledge this aspect of the work misses out on one of its artistically significant (albeit unattractive) features.

Intentionalists who balk at the latter claim may wish to develop an alternative analysis. Such an analysis would involve placing stronger constraints on what constitutes cases of intentional, implicit communication in an artistic context. A basic intuition behind such an attempt would be the idea that

¹⁹ To be applicable to the non-literary arts, this analysis would require modification; most importantly, the clause reading 'in terms of the language in which it was written' would be replaced by 'in terms of the artefact's conventional and non-conventional expressive features'.

although Sōseki the Strange has intentionally fashioned texts that nowhere overtly contradict his favoured Martian story-line, he has failed to satisfy some other conditions require for successful artistic implicature—conditions that are satisfied in the case of Natsume Sōseki. Such conditions are not easy to specify, however; it would seem that they must involve a normative constraint on the implications for the quality of the work. For example, one might revise the analysis presented above by adding the following clause:

- (5) *p* contributes positively to the artistic value of *W* (e.g. it is not extraneous to its explicit content)²⁰

Yet such a move has the disadvantage of yoking hermeneutic principles to normative standards. Against this, one may contend that an artist's action of implying something need not have only positive consequences for a work's value, and that it is best to have interpreters adopt principles that allow them to detect ways in which work's implicit contents can both add to and detract from a work's values.

Are there any decisive reasons for preferring moderate intentionalism over Levinson's theory, which combines hypothetical intentionalism about semantic content with actual intentionalism regarding categorial intentions? As Levinson and others have remarked, in many cases there is no practical difference between the interpretive conclusions reached by following hypothetical as opposed to actual intentionalism. But at times there are, as the Sōseki example shows. In a fine paper on this topic, Gary Iseminger responds to two reasons that Levinson has proposed as motivating a preference for hypothetical intentionalism.²¹ The first of these reasons amounts essentially to the claim that actual intentionalism succumbs to the dilemma sketched above, and Iseminger responds in roughly the same manner as the moderate intentionalism described above, appealing not to 'successful' intentions, but

²⁰ This condition resembles an aspect of Levinson's constraints on evidence in his hypothetical intentionalism, which motivates the choice of interpretive hypotheses not only in light of epistemic considerations, but also, and secondarily, in terms of the implications for the work's artistic quality. Ideal readers choose the interpretation that is epistemically best in light of the right sort of evidence; they are also charitable, and when possible, adopt the interpretation that maximizes the work's artistic value, other things being equal. See 'Intention and Interpretation', p. 179.

²¹ Gary Iseminger, 'Actual Intentionalism vs. Hypothetical Intentionalism', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (forthcoming); I thank Jerrold Levinson for bringing this essay to my attention after I had completed the first draft of the present essay.

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to intentions compatible with textual meaning. The second reason involves a claim about the autonomy of the work of art and the difference between our interpretations of such works and everyday utterances. Iseminger responds that any view that countenances the actual author's categorial intentions does not make the work autonomous in any strong sense. So neither reason settles the matter in hypothetical intentionalism's favour. Turning to the question of the advantages of actual intentionalism regarding semantic content, Iseminger suggests that it is the nature of our 'conversational' interest in art that implies the superiority of actual intentionalism. Allowing that artistic contexts are different from everyday ones, Iseminger nonetheless claims that uptake of actual intentions, and not of hypothetical ones, is what best serves the interpreter's conversational interest. If any appeal is to be made to semantic intentions, only the actual semantic intentions of the author, as opposed to the intentions hypothesized by the ideal reader, will suffice. Here the proponent of hypothetical intentionalism may respond that a key difference between our interest in art and in everyday conversation is that our interest in works is best served by reliance on the evidentiary strictures of hypothetical intentionalism, which, by preventing interpreters from relying on the artist's semantic intentions when they diverge from the hypothetical ones, directs attention more towards works than the minds and aims of their makers. The advocate of moderate intentionalism disputes this, responding that knowledge of minds and aims is invaluable to appreciation of works. In light of this outstanding dispute over the right sort of interest we take in conversational and artistic contexts, and the relevant differences between these two kinds of contexts, it does not seem that a decisive argument for either side has been presented.

Pursuing a line of thought that is perhaps similar in spirit to Iseminger's, one may nonetheless ask whether hypothetical intentionalism is not counter-intuitive. If a valuable part of our approach to works of art is to form a hypothesis about the *actual* author's intentions, what advantage is to be gained by deliberately setting aside some of the evidence that is relevant to the artist's state of mind, and in particular, his or her choices and aims with regard to the work's meanings? To make this question more salient, let us imagine that William Shakespeare's private diary were suddenly discovered. Imagine as well that we have very good reason to believe that this document provides us with excellent evidence about his symbolic aims in writing his plays and poems. Is it really best, or even reasonable, to expect that Shakespeare's interpreters should decide not to read this diary, or that they should

decide to read it yet somehow never allow it to influence their hypotheses about the meanings of Shakespeare's literary works? It seems preferable, on the contrary, to accept the risk that knowledge of the author's intentions could limit the plays' meanings (but not their historical significance), a risk that accompanies the possibility that the genial bard's diaries would help us to discover marvelous, and perhaps previously unknown, facets of his works.

Another argument that may be given in favour of actual or moderate intentionalism runs as follows. To the extent that the distinction between categorial and semantic intentions is difficult, and perhaps even impossible to apply in certain cases (e.g. Sōseki's intentions as evoked above), and to the extent that instances of the two kinds of intentions are interrelated and may jointly entail various meanings of a work, we have good reason to prefer a unitary account in which both the semantic and categorial intentions of the actual artist are held to be relevant to interpretive decisions about the work's artistic content. In other words, given such borderline examples that cannot be handled by hypothetical intentionalism, we must either opt for a thoroughgoing anti-intentionalism or espouse moderate intentionalism. In light of the shortcomings of anti-intentionalism (and given the weaknesses of such alternatives as fictionalist intentionalism), moderate intentionalism is the best option.

No discussion of intentionalism can overlook what must be the most prevalent objection to this entire family of views. How, it is wondered, can anyone reasonably claim to know anything about an artist's intentions? Are these not 'private' mental states, dark, fleeting, and inscrutable, perhaps even non-existent? Such epistemological worries are thought to justify a preference for one of several anti-intentionalist views, or at the very least, the acceptance of a version of hypothetical or fictional (non)intentionalism which advises us to give up on elusive generative matters and rely exclusively on solid textual evidence and public features of a work's context.

In response to this kind of objection, the moderate intentionalist can allow that solid textual evidence and public contextual facts are indeed crucial to all justified interpretive claims. But epistemological worries apply to these matters as well. It is important not to raise the epistemic bar suddenly when it is a matter of beliefs about other minds. If we know anything about the external world of texts and contexts, in a modest, fallibilist sense of knowing, then we also know something about artists' attitudes. Trying to interpret works in light of the latter can be rewarding, perhaps even successful, and moderate intentionalism is a theory of interpretation that has the advantage

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of warranting such attempts. It does not, however, offer any fool-proof discovery procedure, or a guarantee that we can always know what we would like to know about the complex history of a work's creation. The grapes of intention are, alas, often out of reach, but that does not make them sour!

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